

LCQ22: Trafficking of eels of endangered species

Following is a question by the Hon Elizabeth Quat and a written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (October 27):

Question:

As pointed out by a report published by a conservation group in May this year, Hong Kong is a major consumer and global trading hub for critically endangered and endangered species of eels, and that Hong Kong is also a major trafficking hub for regulated eels from Europe, North America and Asia. The report also reveals that almost 90 per cent of the eel samples collected in mid-2020 from restaurants across Hong Kong belonged to critically endangered or endangered species of eels. Besides, according to a local university's study, 45 per cent of the eel samples collected in November 2017 and February 2018 from two major supermarket chains belonged to critically endangered species of European eels listed in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, and the food labels affixed were probably incorrect. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the quantity of eels of critically endangered and endangered species imported to Hong Kong which were seized by the authorities in each of the past 10 years, with a breakdown by (i) scientific name for the species to which the eels belonged and (ii) country of origin of the eels (set out in a table);

(2) of the quantity of eels of critically endangered and endangered species to be exported/re-exported from Hong Kong which were seized by the authorities in each of the past 10 years, with a breakdown by (i) scientific name for the species to which the eels belonged and (ii) export/re-export destination country of the eels (set out in a table); and

(3) in order to combat the trafficking of regulated eels and prevent people from inadvertently buying endangered eel products, whether the Government will amend the Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) Regulations (Cap. 132W) to require that the food labels of prepackaged eel products must provide information on (i) the scientific name for the species to which the eels concerned belonged and (ii) their production method (i.e. wild-caught or farmed); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government is committed to protecting endangered species and is

implementing the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in Hong Kong through the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (Cap. 586) (the Ordinance) to strictly regulate the trade in endangered species. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has been working closely with the Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) in combatting illegal trade in endangered species at import and export control points.

There are different species of eels (*Anguilla* spp.), amongst which only the European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) is listed in the CITES Appendix II and hence regulated by the Ordinance. Import of live European eels of wild origin requires a licence to import issued by the AFCD and the production of an export permit issued by the relevant authority of the exporting place. For non-living European eels, though a licence to import issued by the AFCD is not required, the production of an export permit issued by the relevant authority of the exporting place is still required. Other eel species, such as the Japanese eel (*Anguilla japonica*), are not listed in the CITES Appendices and hence their import and export are not regulated by the Ordinance.

The AFCD has also collected samples of processed eel products in local retail markets for examination. If any scheduled European eels are identified in the samples, investigation and follow-up actions will be carried out. Meanwhile, the AFCD has strengthened publicity and education to the local trade on relevant import and export requirements. The AFCD and the C&ED will also join hands to strengthen enforcement to combat illegal trade in endangered species (including European eels).

(1) Since the European eel is the only eel species scheduled under the Ordinance which requires regulated trade, the AFCD does not have statistics on the seizure of other non-scheduled eel species. The seizure records of illegal import of European eels in the past 10 years are tabulated below:

Year	Exporting place	Quantity of seizure (kg)
2011	(No seizure)	(Not applicable)
2012	(No seizure)	(Not applicable)
2013	(No seizure)	(Not applicable)
2014	Morocco and the Netherlands	Live eel fry (including water) : 230 Processed eel (net weight): 5
2015	(No seizure)	(Not applicable)
2016	Morocco and Spain	Live eel fry (including water) : 121.7
2017	Morocco, Spain and Portugal	Live eel fry (including water) : 116.42
2018	Portugal	Live eel fry (including water) : 206.46
2019	United States	Frozen eel (net weight) 25 260 (Note)

2020	(No seizure)	(Not applicable)
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Note: These frozen European eels were seized due to failure in the production of an export permit issued by the relevant authority of the exporting place.

(2) There was no seizure case of illegal export or re-export of European eels from Hong Kong in the past 10 years.

(3) For part (3) of the question, the Food and Health Bureau advises that the labelling requirements stipulated in the Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) Regulations (Cap. 132W) in respect of pre-packaged food are set with reference to international standards. The said requirements seek to provide consumers with information on the name, ingredient list, details of the manufacturers or packers, etc., of individual food products, but do not involve information on scientific names of the species or were they being wild-caught or farmed, etc. Apart from continuing to work closely with the C&ED, the AFCD has also strengthened publicity and education with a view to reminding the local trade to comply with relevant import and export requirements. For example, the AFCD briefed the trade on the relevant regulations related to European eels trading at the Trade Consultation Forum organised by the Centre for Food Safety in July of this year.